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A suburban community donated a used ambulance to the small town of Tonatico, Mexico, which has strong family ties to Waukegan.

The Village of Northbrook handed over the ambulance keys to a representative of the town during a ceremony on Friday. Immigrants from Tonatico will drive the ambulance about 2,000 miles south to Tonatico sometime in the next few weeks, said Miguel Arizmendi, president of the Club Social Tonatico. The refurbished vehicle, a 1992 Road Rescue light-duty ambulance, is better equipped than the old ambulance the town of Tonatico is using for its small hospital, he said.

"The goal was for Tonatico to get an ambulance, but buying an ambulance is expensive," he said.

Congressman Mark Kirk (R-Highland Park) has been working with the Mexican community in the 10th congressional district through his Latino Advisory Board and helped the Club Social Tonatico find a suburb willing to donate a used ambulance. The Northbrook Fire Department recently purchased an upgraded ambulance to serve its community, and was left with an older, but operational vehicle. In conversations with Village President Gene Marks, Kirk suggested donating the ambulance to Tonatico, which is home to about 10,000 people. An estimated 4,000 people in Waukegan have roots in Tonatico.

"This ambulance is a wonderful Christmas gift for a very poor community in Mexico," Kirk said.

A group of 39 grandparents from Tonatico also arrived Thursday night through a program to reunite Mexican seniors with their U.S. citizen grandchildren.

Working with the U.S. Embassy in Mexico, Kirk and his Latino Advisory Board secured tourist visas for the grandparents. All of the grandparents had sponsors who were either U.S. citizens

or legal permanent residents and will return to Mexico later in January.

This is the tenth Mexican group to come to Lake County. Other waves of seniors came from La Luz, the state of Mexico and San Jose, Guanajuato. Another wave of grandparents from the state of Mexico is expected to visit in March.